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ABSTRACT

Insights into the social and cultural experiences of Hispanic people can be gleaned from both the social sciences and literature, and it is probably accurate to state that values are the most important shared dimension of a culture. There are not many value differentiations that separate the Hispanic from the Anglo. In examining the first national study of Mexican Americans (Grebler, 1970), it is noted that Mexican Americans are both the oldest and the newest minority in the United States. Their life styles (now predominantly urban), family and marital trends, goals for their children, and work values are more and more similar to those of the dominant Anglo society, and they are increasing their interaction with Anglos. There is a greater diversity in political tactics, an increasing differentiation in in-group and out-group perceptions, and a belief that discrimination is lessening. Cultural tenacity is not as widespread nor as powerful as literature and leadership would lead others to believe. Literature sources on Hispanic culture which may be useful to educators are discussed, followed by a 22-item list giving the bibliographic information. (JMM)

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MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION

FACT SHEET

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Hispanic Culture And Literature: An Overview

by

Romeo Di Benedetto

February 1983

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HISPANIC CULTURE AND LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

The sociology of knowledge reminds us "that thinking is not an autonomous mental activity, explicable only in terms of categories like mind or reason, but an activity that takes place under determinate social and cultural conditions." (Rossides, 1978,p.2) In applying this idea to Hispanic people, therefore, it is necessary to understand their social and cultural experiences, insights which can be gleaned from both the social sciences and literature. It is probably accurate to state that values are the most important shared dimension of a culture and as Rokeacn writes: "An adult probably has tens of thousands of beliefs, thousands of attitudes, but only dozens of values." (Rokeach, in Eastman, 1971, p. 15)

Are there value differentiations that separate the Hispanic from the Anglo?

There are not too many value differentiation that separate the Hispanic from the Anglo. In his study of northcentral New Mexico, Eastman learned that "Spanish-Americans were found to have first-order (i.e., dominant) orientations stressing: (1) subjugation to nature; (2) present orientations; (3) "being activity; and (4) individualism. Orientations in the dominant Anglo society stress: (1) mastery over nature; (2) future orientations; (3) "doing" activity; and (4) individualism." (1971, p. 24-5)

However, in examining the first national study of Mexican Americans (Grebler, 1970, ch. 24), we note that Mexican Americans are both the oldest and the newest minority in the United States, that they are now predominantly urban, and that they have increased both their number of middle-class persons, and their interaction with Anglos. Their family and marriage patterns are increasingly similar to that of the rest of the population (e.g., very rarely do Mexican Americans live in an extended family household, the husbands are less dominant, and the wives are less submissive than they were previously). Also, their values related to work, individual achievement, and goals for their children are very similar to those in the dominant society. They are not opposed to getting socially involved with Anglos, "and about 25 per cent of the Spanish-surnamed persons in Los Angeles who married in 1963 chose an Anglo as a mate." Increasingly, there is greater diversity in political tactics, ranging from "quiet fighting" to confrontative militancy. Finally, there is an increasing differentiation in in-group and out-group perceptions. They see themselves as more emotional, less materialistic, harder working, and having stronger family ties than others. They also see themselves as being less progressive and are more inclined to place the blame of their problems on others, although they do believe that discrimination is lessening. Finally, cultural tenacity is not as widespread nor as powerful as literature and leadership would lead others to believe.

What are some literature sources on Hispanic culture which may be useful to educators?

An important source is the article, "The Sociology and Anthropology of Mexican-Americans: A Distortion of Mexican-American History" by Octavio Romano. For a multiplicity of perspectives, and especially helpful for educators is the article in "Mexican-Americans" by Forbes, which is a summarized version of an earlier work entitled, "Mexican-Americans: A Handbook for Educators." (Burma, 1970, p. 7-16)

In an essay entitled "On Culture," Juan Gomez-Quinones calls for an academic and political debate on culture. Specifically, he comments on culture and its relation to domination, history, the border, class struggle, and the role of the intellectual.

In Introduction to Chicano Studies: A Reader, Duran and Bernard (eds.) examine, historically, such topics as Mayan, Aztec and Spanish culture, along with the internal culture of the Chicano and the external culture, on relationships with the "Gabacho" world. (Duran, 1973)

One of the most thoroughly researched and documented views of Chicano history and literature is the scholarly work, Chicanos: Antologia historia y literaria, by Tito Villanueva (editor) available, however, only in Spanish.

Gerard Clarke, in his article "Contemporary Puerto Rican, Cuban-in-Exile, and Mexican-American Literature in a Pluralistic Society", writes on the attitudes of the Spanish-speaking people in the Unites States and on the literature of Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexican Americans published between 1960 and 1973.

Simmen's primary purpose in compiling The Chicano was to put into one volume the most representative short fiction written about Mexican Americans during the last 100 years ranging from "The Mexicans" by Jack London, published in the Saturday Evening Post in 1911, to "Un Hijo del Sol" by Genaro Gonzalez.

In "Mexican Muralism: Its Social-Educative Roles in Latin America and the United States," Shifra Goldman, an art historian specializing in modern Latin America, argues that Mexican murals can still be used in an educative manner in schools. There are more than 1,000 murals in California alone, but there also are others in the Midwest and Southwest. No single style unites them, except that they all attempt to present a Chicano point of view and redefine and change their history in the United States. Actually, the article is only one of many fine examples on Mexican folklore and folk art in the United States in a thematic issue of AZTLAN, 1982.

Lomeli and Urioste provide us with an annotated and critical bibliography, Chicano Perspectives in Literature: A Critical and Annotated Bibliography, regarding the quality, importance and impact of 131 literary works by Chicanos.

Sommers and Ybarra-Frausto, through their book Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays, sought to introduce Chicano literature to a broad readership and to provide a stimulus and challenge to literary critics both in academia and in the Chicano community itself.

Bruce-Novoa presents us with an "Interview with Jose Antonio Villareal," author of the first Chicano novel. Villareal is a controversial figure among Chicano authors for he has questioned the validity of the term "Chicano literature," as well as its social, political and racial criteria. He maintains that Chicano literature is simply a part of American literature, as southern, western or any other regional literature, Villareal asserts: "Outside of ethnicity, I find nothing singular of Chicano writings." (Nova, 1976, p.44)

Carmen Bravo-Villasante, noted historian and critic of children's literature and author of the definitive Historia y Antologia de la Literatura Infant Iberoamericana, has highlighted the themes of Spanish literature written for children from the earliest stages, such as The Miracles of Our Lady by the Benedictine Gonzalo de Berceo to The Book of Patronius by the famous Prince Don Juan Manuel (1282-1349) in which appears the tale, "The Youth Who Married a Shrewish Wife," antecedent of Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew," and "The King and the Deceitful Weavers" which became Anderson's famous story, "The Emperor's New Clothes." Carmen writes that:

> "The cultured literature...was consciously pedagogical and voiced fixed precepts that were nonetheless reasonable and effective for producing an ideal, model child. The popular literature was born as if created by the children themselves, who aided in developing its form....What had begun as only religious prints had become a form of children's entertainment with multiple themes." (Bravo-Villasante, 1973, p. 156)

Frank Pino has compiled Mexican-Americans: A Research Bibliography, which is an interdisciplinary guide covering a very wide range of topics and materials. Charles Tatum has also compiled a very useful reference, A Selected and Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Studies. To assist in the study of the literature of Spain and of Spanish America, McLennon Library of McGill University has prepared A Student's Guide to Reference Resources in Spanish Literature. Tash and Nupold have compiled La Raza: A Selective Bibliography of Library Resources which lists books, periodicals, microforms,government documents, records, pamphlets, and filmstrips under such varied subjects as health, housing, law enforcement, music, religion, theater arts, etc., in over 3,000 pages. Finally, the book Chicano Authors by Bruce-Nova contains interviews with fourteen serious writers in which all are asked the same twenty-four questions about themselves and Chicano literature.

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